

Congratulations, your child has graduated! Now what?

If your child just graduated from college or university, he or she is part of the second largest generation in history – the Millennials. Born between 1980 and 1994, Millennials have, over the past 15 years, been flooding into the marketplace, adding a considerable injection of youth and talent. They now comprise 36 percent of the workforce and by 2020 that number will rise to 46 percent. Younger workers were in high demand in the early 2000s, so older Millennials had an easier time establishing their careers. As they started to dominate the junior levels of organizations in every sector, entry level opportunities began to shrink and now today's recent graduates frequently face a tougher time starting up their career.

As a parent, it is natural to worry about your children's future and wonder how you can help them begin their career successfully, especially when the economy is weakened. Take comfort in knowing that there are many other parents out there experiencing the same concern. Supporting your children through their initial phases of becoming a young professional begins with encouraging them. They will need you to continue to believe in them, especially when they may struggle to stay optimistic themselves. Assure them that landing their first job is not as impossible as it may seem. While the state of the economy is out of their control, with some ingenuity, determination, and your support, they can be successful. The key is to have a plan.

Helping your child transition into the working world

It is not easy making the transition from student to young professional, so your child may ask you where to begin. Try offering them the following tips:

- **“Create the right impression.”** First impressions count. Money may be tight, especially after having paid for expensive studies, but your child should consider investing in an appropriate job interview outfit – particularly if he or she is hoping for a corporate career. While many software engineering firms, tech start-ups and creative agencies allow for casual attire, most corporate organizations specify business casual or business formal attire in their HR policy. At all stages in your children's career, they should take cues from those around them to help them make decisions about what is acceptable and what is not. When they are seeking to join a workplace they should research this workplace and any policies and dress code that may be available to them.
- **“Stress your strengths.”** Younger Millennials have a few advantages over older colleagues that make them highly marketable, such as their astounding ability with technology. Encourage your child to make a list of these skills, and be sure their prospective employers know about it! If they have other unique talents – a second or third language for example, make sure that this is reflected in their resume. They should also be specific about how their extracurricular, volunteer or part-time work experience has added to their skills – for example, customer service, teamwork, leadership, or flexibility. Employers are not only looking for industry knowledge; they want to know how your child is likely to behave at work and how likely he or she is to contribute to their organization in a positive way.
- **“Personalize your applications.”** Instead of a randomized approach of submitting hundreds of generic letters and resumes to various recruiters and job postings, your child should carefully tailor applications to specific companies that he or she would like to work with. If your kids can show that they have researched each organization and why they would be a good fit, they will have a better chance at being considered for the job.

- **“Network and make contacts.”** While in many cultures the importance of relationship-building is a fact of life, in others this may be a new insight and a new skill that your child needs to learn and appreciate. Coach your child to seek out people who can help them professionally. They can join professional and alumni associations or volunteer somewhere, which will help them develop and improve their networking skills. A quick and easy way to start – if your child has not already done so – is to create a professional profile on LinkedIn or local versions of networking sites. They can also talk to people in their desired industry to find out what they look for in prospective employees. Another tip for your child: be courageous; people are usually flattered to be asked for advice. Encourage them to build multiple relationships with trusted sources. You never know when someone will have a good connection that might lead to other valuable connections or to a good career opportunity for your child. If your child is shy and struggling to engage in such conversations, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can provide tips and coaching advice to enhance their social skills.
- **“Volunteer within your chosen field.”** Where possible, volunteer activities can provide your kids with an opportunity to learn new skills and enhance their skills relevant to their chosen career. For example, if your child is considering a career in teaching, he or she might want to look for opportunities to work with younger children in their community or with a not-for-profit organization focused on education. It is best for your child to find a volunteer position with an organization that shares his or her values and that will benefit from his or her contributions. Volunteering can be a great way to network with contacts, discover new mentors, and demonstrate a positive attitude to potential employers. Equally important during a period of transition and uncertainty the routine, time management and social contact gained through volunteering is also beneficial for your children’s mental and physical health.

It may take some time for your children to land their first full-time career-oriented job. Given the slow growth of the global economy and the consequent challenges in finding full-time work, a part-time job may be a temporary alternative. It will allow them to conduct job searches, network and interview for their ultimate career while earning money and gaining valuable work experience. Every job provides opportunities to learn new skills, enhance existing skills and meet new people who can provide them with professional references. They are also demonstrating to their future employer that they are prepared to work hard. Once their foot is on the first rung of the corporate ladder, remind your kids to continue to focus on their finances. Their 20s are not just about launching their career; they are about launching their financial future as well. Reinforce the importance of paying down their student debt as soon as possible and saving for their future goals.

Being a parent of a recent graduate can be stressful at times, but it is also very rewarding. Career decisions and discussing serious issues that impact your child’s future may seem intimidating at first, but can be easily accomplished with the right motivation and planning. You and your child can access career counselling through your EAP for resume-writing help and finding full-time or part-time work.

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP. Contact details can be found on your EAP brochure or you can your local operator and request to place a collect call to Canada at 905-886-3605. You will be put in touch with our Care Access Centre who will arrange for help closer to home.